



RECOVERY HOUSING BEST PRACTICES

# HOW TO HIRE AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HELPFUL TIPS FROM THE FLETCHER GROUP RCOE

## IT PAYS TO DO IT RIGHT

Serving on a Recovery House Board of Directors can be both challenging and rewarding. Responsibilities include the procurement of needed resources, the establishment of a clear direction, and prudent, well-informed leadership. Equally important is the ability to manage and, in some cases, hire an Executive Director.

Securing a new ED may be one of the most critical tasks ever undertaken by your Board of Directors. The quest may be particularly challenging in rural areas where extraordinary creativity and resourcefulness may be required to win out over other employers.

That's why the RCORP-Rural Center of Excellence on SUD Recovery at the Fletcher Group made this brochure. On the following pages, you'll find a detailed, step-by-step methodology and checklist designed to help you achieve the best possible outcome for both those you work with and those for whom you work.

### A METHODOLOGY AND CHECKLIST

To help you procure the best possible talent

# LAY OF THE LAND

The search for a new Executive Director depends largely on the revenue and size of the Recovery House. Larger facilities can in some cases afford to assign a “Hiring Committee” to oversee the process. Smaller facilities may need to involve all Board members with perhaps one member designated as the “Hiring Lead.”

## *Many moving parts*

Hiring a new Executive Director entails a range of activities, as outlined below.

- Transmission of knowledge from the outgoing Executive Director to the new Executive Director
- Smooth and efficient continuation of all operations during the transition
- Maintenance of satisfactory care and services for all residents
- Smooth and efficient continuation of all financial transactions, including cash flow
- Maintenance of community and donor support
- Identification and support of interim leadership
- Continued access to essential electronic and physical documents and data

With all that needs to be done, it’s important that the Board of Directors make the best use of its time and energy.



## *First things first*

Whether the Recovery House is brand new or well-established, the first thing the Board does is collect a body of critical information. Two steps are required to do that:

1. Review your organization’s original mission and vision to see if it still rings true or requires modification.
2. Conduct a detailed “Needs Assessment” of your organization’s short-term and long-term needs.

# WHAT EXACTLY IS A "NEEDS ASSESSMENT?"

A "Needs Assessment" establishes your current strengths and identifies the organizational needs that the new Executive Director is tasked with. The findings of the "Needs Assessment" may also help guide the Board's search.

## *Two standard forms*

A "Needs Assessment" comes in two standard forms:

### **SWOT Analysis**

SWOT stands for "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats." A SWOT Analysis helps you make better plans by exposing and articulating the strengths and weaknesses of your organization as well as the opportunities and threats it is being presented with.

### **PEST Analysis**

PEST stands for "Political, Economic, Social, and Technological." It refers to a specific management methodology that organizations can use to assess external factors that can powerfully affect operations. A PEST Analysis can be particularly helpful to new Executive Directors of rural Recovery Houses in refining their efforts to gain support from political and community partners.



## *An important question to ask*

When completed, the SWOT and PEST Analyses enable the Board to accurately determine short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals for the organization as well as the next steps to be taken by the new Executive Director. But there's another question that needs to be answered and that is, "What background or support will the new Executive Director need to achieve the goals established by the Board?" Knowing the answer to that question can help the Board determine the experience, knowledge and skill-set that will be required of the new Executive Director. Indeed, after accumulating all the information described above, the Board may wish to revise the job description.

# DEFINING RESPONSIBILITIES, REQUIREMENTS, AND TITLE

The Board of Directors should clearly define the most essential qualifications required of the new Executive Director. To help do that, there are several more questions that should be asked/

## *More questions to ask*

- What work experience is preferred? Is prior experience at a Recovery House the only requirement? Or is some kind of business background also a key requirement?
- How much autonomy will the new Executive Director have to cut, add, or change basic program elements?
- What higher education degrees are required? A Bachelor's Degree in a specific field? Or a Master's Degree?
- Does the candidate have so much prior work experience that it offsets a lack of formal education?
- What will be the successful candidate's official title and does that title accurately reflect the person's actual level of responsibility and autonomy?

Keep in mind that the title should be line with the candidate's expectations. For example, the title "Executive Director" would suggest a higher level of autonomy, a higher level of responsibility, significant work experience and education, as well as a salary based on those criteria. (Appendix A compares two organizations seeking new leadership for a Recovery House.)



## *How to set the right pay range*

It's important to arrive at a competitive salary and benefits package suitable to the Recovery House's geographic area and standing in the industry. Here are some questions that can help establish that:

- What is the salary of the outgoing Executive Director and is that salary still competitive in your market?
- What options and time frames are there for raises and bonuses if the new Executive Director meets his or her performance goals?
- How does the salary compare with the salaries of other staff members?
- Is there a retirement plan? If not, the salary may need to be higher. A helpful resource for determining a fair wage, based on either location or nonprofit category, is [guidestar.org](http://guidestar.org).

# NO NEED TO RUSH

Take the time needed to include all of the above steps in your decision. A rushed decision can harm the quality and reputation of your program and organization as well as the recovery of your residents.

## *Set the right time frame*

To set the start and end times of the recruiting process, it can be helpful to ask the following questions:

### **What is the deadline for submitting resumes?**

The general practice is at least two weeks, but you may want to establish some criteria for accepting resumes that arrive late.

### **Will a different timeframe apply to internal candidates?**

Some organizations give current employees advanced notice to encourage promotions within the organization.

### **How long will the review of resumes continue?**

It is common practice for the Board or Hiring Committee to take between one and two weeks to assess the candidates, with each board or committee member reviewing all resumes and sorting the candidates into groups of “No,” “Maybe,” and “Yes.” During the initial round of interviews, the list is typically narrowed down to between two and five candidates with the list further narrowed down to two or three for in-person interviews.



## *Making the final decision*

How to decide the deadline for making your final decision?

Once the interviews have been completed, consider the time needed to check the candidates' references, make a final decision, and make an offer. You want to take enough time to make a wise decision and yet not take so much time that you lose the best candidate to another employer.

This may be particularly true in rural communities where the pool of candidates is smaller than in urban areas.

# PUBLICIZING YOUR SEARCH

Your Board of Directors may want to advertise or promote the job opening. This will of course depend on whether you are seeking internal or external candidates and how far you want to extend the search geographically—local, regional, or national.

## *Rural considerations*

Hiring an Executive Director in a small rural community may be challenging and may require some creativity. For example, it may be helpful to enlist current or former staff, donors, Board Members, and other supporters to act on your behalf. Ask around: Is there someone already known to them who meets or exceeds your requirements?

A good place to look for candidates may be within local businesses, other nonprofits, and non-profit state associations. It may also pay to explore other Recovery Houses, including those in larger urban areas where successful staff members may be eager to move up to an administrative position. In this case, however, it's important to keep in mind the very real differences between working in an urban versus a rural setting.

## *Getting the word out*

Don't forget to use traditional methods of publicizing your search, such as newspapers, college job boards, and web-based options such as Glassdoor, Indeed, or LinkedIn. (See Appendix B for additional search tools.)



## *Other options*

Given the difficulty of finding qualified candidates in rural areas, you may wish to consider other options:

1. Collaborating with another organization to “share” an Executive Director. This would allow you to split the salary and benefits.
2. Contracting with a Mental Health or Substance Use Treatment Agency to provide what might be called “Executive Director Services.”
3. Hiring a person whose qualifications are currently limited but who can grow into the role when given good coaching and mentoring.

# REVIEWING RESUMES AND INTERVIEWING

Divide the resumes into three categories: “No,” “Maybe,” and “Yes.” Send a letter thanking those who do not qualify, then subject those in the “Yes” category to a second review, narrowing down the number to three to five candidates to be interviewed by phone.

## *The interview process*

It's good to plan the interview in advance. The following questions can help you do that.

### **How many rounds of interviews will you conduct?**

The first round of interviews is typically done by phone or video conference call. The second round is typically done in-person unless there's a third round. In that case, round two can be either in-person or as a video conference call. Whichever round is last should be in-person with the entire Board of Directors.

### **How much time will it take and who will be involved?**

In addition to the time taken for the interview, some time should be set aside for the candidate to tour your facility and meet the staff and residents. It's recommended that staff be involved in the interview process since they are the ones who will be working day-to-day with the new Executive Director. They know best how and when they need support from their leader and are able to ask questions directly related to their concerns and experience.

### **How best to conduct the first round of interviews?**

The top three to five candidates are typically interviewed using a video conference call service such as Skype, Zoom, or Google Hangouts. The live video allows interviewers to see the facial expressions and body language of the candidates. It's also much more personal, allowing interviewers to better gauge how the candidate might fit in.



### **What interview style best suits you?**

Depending on the size of your Board, the first round of interviews can be one-on-one between the candidate and the Hiring Committee Chairperson, Board Chairperson, or a person designated by them to do the interview. If, on the other hand, you have established a Hiring Committee, then the interview can be conducted in a “panel interview” style. It can be helpful to prepare questions ahead of time. When doing so, try to think of follow-up questions for each primary question in order to elicit more detail and clarify the candidate's answers.

These are just some of the questions a Board or hiring committee may ask itself as it works to define the interview process. Of course, the final process will be up to each Board and will depend at least in part on local, current circumstances. Collaboration and communication between Board members is essential to getting the process right and obtaining the best possible outcome.

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Many of the questions you'll ask will relate directly to your facilities, your organization and your industry. But here are six general subjects you might also want to ask about.

- Introductory questions like, "What motivates you?" and "How did you find out about us?"
- Work experience
- Leadership
- Problem solving and strategic thinking
- Organization and cultural fit
- Financial background

Thoughtful questions in these categories can help flesh out the candidate's skills, experience, thinking, and personality. The questions can be assigned to different rounds of the interview process. Questions that elicit a particularly telling response can be repeated in later rounds for the benefit of those who missed it the first time. It's good to add more candidate-specific questions in the second round of interviews. And don't forget to leave time for the candidates to ask questions.

## *Finding a "good fit"*

In addition to a resume and cover letter, consider asking candidates to provide a writing sample, a presentation they've developed, or a fund-raising campaign they've developed. These could be real-world examples or something they create in response to your request. For example, you could ask the candidates to write up a mock fund-raising campaign or a fundraising letter sent to donors.

Your Board may also want to set aside time for the final candidates to meet your staff. Observing their interaction will give you an idea how they might be work together. Don't be surprised if staff members form very different impressions than you do. And don't forget that ignoring staff feedback runs the risk of causing significant problems no matter who's hired as ED.



## *Congratulations! You're hired!*

The chosen candidate hopefully accepts your offer, but what if he or she doesn't? The Board must then decide upon the next-best candidate or perhaps even restart the process. If, on the other hand, the chosen candidate accepts the offer, the next and final step is how to introduce and onboard the new ED. Once again, it's good to plan ahead using the following questions:

- Who will train the new hire?
- How to introduce the new ED to residents?
- What tools will the new ED need?
- How often will the new ED's performance be reviewed? It's good to provide feedback regularly for at least the first two months.
- What goals will the Board set for the new ED to achieve within the first 30, 60 or 90 days? Or the first year or first three to five years?
- How involved and influential does the Board want the new ED to be?

## *Well Done, Board!*



HOW TO DECIDE

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OR PROGRAM DIRECTOR?

## WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

A Recovery Housing Board of Directors searching for new leadership must think about the responsibilities and requirements, but is it also a time to think about the new leader's title? What will work best for you? Titles such as Chief Executive Officer, Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer or President indicate that the Board is seeking a higher level of experience and education to lead the Recovery House. Such titles also suggest the payment of higher salaries.

Smaller facilities with less revenue may want to consider titles such as Program Director, Director, Residential Program Supervisor, or Director of Programs. Set expectations that align with the title and the pay level you have in mind. If the plan is to hire an Executive Director at \$100,000 per year, more responsibility is expected. A Program Director hired at \$40,000 per year would have fewer responsibilities.

### SOME HELPFUL GUIDELINES

For deciding  
responsibilities,  
requirements, titles  
and expectations.



# WHAT'S EXPECTED

## *Of an Executive Director*

Below are the responsibilities typically assigned to a newly hired Executive Director who's given a high level of autonomy in managing day-to-day operations. The Executive Director would also be empowered to develop and execute strategic plans.

- Provide leadership in terms of inspiring, engaging, and motivating both staff and community
- Implement and oversee the organization's current strategic thinking through annual operating plans
- Recommend and lead subsequent revisions to all strategic planning efforts
- Strengthen the facility's ability to positively influence the behavioral health profession through leadership, advocacy, and exemplary clinical and administrative practices
- Strengthen core programs and implement best clinical and operational practices
- Expand access to services that improve client care
- Apply best-practice Management Metrics to ensure the production of assessments, outcomes, and reporting standards equal to or exceeding industry standards
- Financially manage site operations and adjust practices as changes impact the budget
- Put processes in place for clients to reach their personal milestones and guide throughput of care from Admission/Intake to Discharge/Step-Down to a lower level of care
- Oversee facility managers to ensure that care is provided in a safe environment



## *Of a Program Director*

Below are the responsibilities typically assigned to a Program Director with supervisory power but less autonomy than an Executive Director.

- Can re-design and lead programs in partnership with community stakeholders
- Collaborates with the Board of Directors on all phases of program administration, program development, and scheduling
- Provides leadership to the team regarding program operations
- Prepares and presents performance evaluations
- When needed, makes appropriate compensation recommendations
- Provides training and holds staff accountable for attendance
- Interviews applicants for open positions and selects the final candidates
- Monitors adherence to accreditation procedures and practices
- Complies with the organization's policies to create and support a positive, professional, team-oriented, harassment-free work environment by understanding

# WHAT'S REQUIRED

## *Of an Executive Director*

Below are the requirements that must typically be met to be hired as an Executive Director. Meeting the requirements proves that the candidate has the experience and educational background deserving of the Board's trust.

- A Master's Degree in a Behavioral Health field
- Active Licensure and ten years of experience as a Professional Counselor, Clinical Social Worker, Addictions Counselor, or Marriage Counselor. Associate licensees are also encouraged to apply if they have seven or more years of experience.
- Strong knowledge of principles and practices governing the operation of an inpatient behavioral health facility
- Extensive knowledge of state and federal regulatory and various accreditation requirements related to behavioral health management
- The ability to read and interpret written information, write clearly and informatively, and edit written material for accurate spelling and grammar
- The ability to speak clearly and persuasively in both positive and negative situations
- The ability to listen carefully, clarify misunderstandings, respond to questions, make effective presentations, and hold productive meetings
- Working knowledge of Microsoft Office Suite, Google Business Suite, and EHR software
- If the candidate is in recovery herself or himself, she or he must be in continuous sobriety for at least five years



## *Of a Program Director*

The experience and education requirements of a Program Director candidate are much less extensive, as indicated below:

- At least a Bachelor's Degree with a Master's Degree preferred
- Prior and current experience in the fields of addiction and mental health
- A working knowledge of behavioral health management practices and clinical operations
- Familiar with state and federal regulatory and various accreditation requirements related to behavioral health management
- A working knowledge of services, financial management, and marketing techniques
- Ability to travel at least ten percent of the time

Note: Some Board members may not be aware that many of those in recovery dedicate themselves to the recovery of others. The requirement that Executive Directors who have been in recovery must have five years of continuous sobriety is significant. Posting this requirement in a job opening tells job seekers that your organization is a recovery-friendly employer.

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HIRING CHECKLIST

This checklist is provided by the Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellent to help Recovery Housing Boards of Directors optimize their hiring of a new Executive Director. Ensure the best possible outcome by ticking off, or at least considering, every item in the list.

ACTION	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Complete an up-to-date "Needs Assessment"	SWOT and PEST Analyses each take a full day to complete. Setting short-term and long-term goals can also take a full day.	The Chairperson of the Board in collaboration with the current Executive Director, existing staff, and the fiscal agent.
Determine who will serve as Interim ED, if needed	If current ED gives two weeks' notice, install the Interim ED to transfer knowledge to new ED.	Board of Directors
Choose the Hiring Leader	Decide before the "Needs Assessment" is completed or within one week of receiving current ED's resignation.	A Hiring Committee formed by the Board, the Board itself with one member chosen as Lead, or a hired recruiter.
Determine job responsibilities, requirements, pay, and application deadline	One week or less	The Hiring Committee, Hiring Lead, or Board Chairperson working with the recruiter
Set time frame for interviews and preferred hiring date	At same time the job responsibilities, requirements, etc. are determined	The Hiring Committee, Hiring Lead, or Board Chairperson working with the recruiter
Conduct Internal, Local, or External Search	Internal search based on Needs Assessment; local search by word of mouth; external search through job boards, newspapers, and social media.	Internal and local searches by Board of Directors, Hiring Committee, Hiring Chairperson, or Recruiter; External search by Hiring Committee, Hiring Chairperson, or Recruiter.
Resume Review	As resumes arrive; completed within one week of application deadline.	Hiring Committee led by the Chairperson, Hiring Lead, or Recruiter

ACTION	TIME FRAME	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Develop Interview Questions	Standard questions developed during search; individualized questions developed as resumes are reviewed	Hiring Committee led by the Chairperson, Hiring Lead, or Recruiter
Initial round of interviews by video or phone	The week after resumes are reviewed	Hiring Committee led by the Chairperson, Hiring Lead, or Recruiter
Notify eliminated candidates; schedule 2nd round of interviews once 1st round done	Notify in writing or by phone as soon as a decision is made; within one week of first round Interviews	Hiring Chairperson, Hiring Lead, or Recruiting Group
In-person interviews of two or three candidates	One week following the initial in-person interviews	Hiring Committee, Hiring Lead, or Recruiter (including staff?)
Board meets, selects, and makes an offer to final candidate	Verbal offer, then written offer, as soon as candidate is chosen	The Board Chairperson



# QUESTIONS TO ASK

## WHEN INTERVIEWING AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### INTROS

- Tell us about yourself.
- Do you have a business background?
- What draws you to this position?
- What are your two or three most significant accomplishments, either personal or professional?
- What are your two or three most significant failures and what would you do differently if you had them to do over?

### EXPERIENCE

- What strategic planning experience do you have?
- Do you have experience with budgets and budget management?
- How does your budget management experience relate to the oversight of a non-profit?
- What is your experience with HR-related duties such as hiring and firing staff?

### LEADERSHIP

- What is your management philosophy?
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What would your previous performance reports say about your management style?
- Have you worked with a Board in the past? If so, how was that relationship?
- Have you ever trained Board members to raise funds? If so, how did you do it?
- What would you do to ensure a productive relationship with a Board?
- Tell me about a time you took a significant personal risk in your career.
- Describe a time when you had to deliver bad news to a group or a board.

## PROBLEM-SOLVING/ STRATEGIC THINKING

- Describe a time when you had a conflict with a team member. How did you resolve the issue?
- Tell us about a time you encountered an unexpected issue while working on a project. How did you manage it?
- What successful strategies have you developed and implemented?
- What are some changes or innovations that could positively impact Recovery Housing?
- Tell me about a time you weren't willing to say no to a request and got overloaded.
- Tell me about a time you had to make a correction mid-way through a process.

## EXPERIENCE

- What is your experience with recovery housing?
- How would you handle community or media criticism?
- How would you promote the organization to the local community?
- Please give us some examples of previous successful fund-raising that you've been a part of.
- In your current or previous job, how did you partner with outside organizations to advance the mission of your organization?

## FIDUCIARY EXPERIENCE

It's recommended that all organizations separate their fiduciary duties from all other daily operations. This may be especially difficult for small, rural Recovery Houses where the best course of action may be to outsource financial matters to a Certified Public Accountant, a part-time bookkeeper, or another accounting service that follows generally accepted accounting practices. Executive Directors will hopefully have a general knowledge of accounting principles, but should generally not be expected to be financial experts. For Boards that consider that some form of financial expertise necessary, the following questions may be useful:

- Are you familiar with Excel? Are you familiar with Quickbooks?
- Explain to us what "revenue" and "expenses" are and the purpose of maintaining a Chart of Accounts.
- Give the candidate a simple accounting document and ask the candidate to share their interpretation.



For Recovery  
Housing Board of  
Directors looking for  
a new Executive  
Director

# RECRUITING RESOURCES



## ONLINE POSTINGS

There are many websites where potential candidates may find the posting. Take the time to investigate which search methods work best for your organization, how much they cost, and what services they provide to help find the best candidates.



## THE USUAL SUBJECTS

Leading the group are LinkedIn, Indeed, Facebook, and Idealist.org, an extensive job board with thousands of job postings. Facebook Marketing charges a nominal fee and allows you to advertise to particular regions and segments of the population.



## ORGANIZATIONS

Check out the following:

- Young professional organizations
- The State Departments of Labor
- Non-profit Association Job Boards
- Leadership programs
- Behavioral Health Associations
- College Career Centers and their web-based services such as 'Handshake.'
- The Nonprofit Times--a trade organization
- supporting non-profit leadership with its own Career Center link to job postings, similar to the Bridgespan Group.



## THE SPECIALISTS

Commongood Careers is a recruiting agency focused on the management of non-profit organizations. The Moran Company is designed specifically to find Executive Director talent. They provide free consultation prior to paid services.



## LOCALLY

Your local Chamber of Commerce or State Chamber of Commerce may share your job posting, though a fee may be required.